



## **Connecticut Farm Bureau Association, Inc.**

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October 1, 2005

USDA Natural Resources and Environment Under Secretary Mark Rey  
Jamie L. Whitten Federal Building  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250-3355.

Dear Under Secretary Rey:

Connecticut Farm Bureau would like to take this opportunity to submit comments regarding the 2007 Farm Bill. Many of our full time producers are finishing harvesting silage corn, apples and vegetables and may have not been able to join you as the local Lions Club put on their Berlin Fair. We would like to make the following comments for your review:

**1. The competitiveness of U.S. agriculture and domestic markets.**

Our farmers want to be very competitive in the domestic and international markets. Please acknowledge domestic markets means different things to different people. To CT Farm Bureau the domestic market is for all our consumable food and plant products, products people in this state like to buy from local farmers. The farm bill must allow for a much stronger presence in the horticulture, greenhouse and specialty crops area. To our farmers the "specialty" crops are our regular crops and grain is the specialty crop! The fact we have to compete with a Canadian market that seems to be able to get their crops down here to the Boston/New York market so much cheaper than we can grow it locally, suggests there is a very serious problem. *We must programs that encourage promotion and production of locally grown food and plants.*

**2. The challenges facing new farmers as they enter agriculture.**

Farmers entering agriculture in Connecticut start on a small scale or ease in as part time farmers. The University of Connecticut (UConn) has been doing programs through risk management to help new farmers, but it is done on a consistent enough basis. Other groups have done their best to try and assist, but the fact remains we need to see a program set up with specific funding stream to help new farmers maneuver in the system of getting permits, finding out which taxes they need to pay, how to hire farm labor and the rest of the challenges facing inexperienced, small business people. CT farmers also have much greater start up and input costs than more agriculturally oriented states. To add to the mix, the challenges of securing agricultural land can simply make farming cost prohibitive. For instance building lots routinely sell for \$50,000-60,000 per acre. One of our biggest challenges is just keeping support services in the region, and knowing where to go to secure those services. There are very few corner feed and seed stores who service agriculture any more. *We need educational dollars and we need more outreach on helping new farmers create farm business plans and secure start up loans.*

### **3. The appropriateness of the distribution of farm program benefits.**

Connecticut farmers do not routinely grow the various commodities you have programs for. We do have corn ground used to support our dairy farms, but the Farm Bill must find ways to address dairy, which is what holds the largest tracks of acreages open in the state of Connecticut for agriculture. The Compact worked, and when that failed because of political wrangling, and MILC came in, it provided some relief to our smaller dairy's. Please realize Connecticut has some of the most productive dairy farms in the northeast. We milk on average 120 cows and to be more efficient on limited acreages, are seeing multi-generational farms more and more which milk in excess of 250 cows. These farms which support more than one family are left out of the distribution cycle for funding. They simply do not get the same benefits from MILC as the small, sole proprietors do. *The farm bill needs to have a dairy program that allows for families who farm together to have the same opportunities as those who farm alone. MILC should be set up based on the family members who farm, not just as one farm unit.*

### **4. The achievement of conservation and environmental goals**

Farm conservation programs such as EQIP are vital to how we farm with in a state with such a high population density. We want to do what ever we can to conserve our resources, yet our land converts to development at a rate of over 8,000 acres per year. We also want to be good neighbors at the same time. Every year we face increasing regulations on the municipal, state and federal level, and we must either find funding and conform or sell our farms. The cost of some of these regulations is becoming very high, especially those requiring construction such as ag waste facilities. Farmland Preservation is also a very important tool our farmers use to secure a stable land base for their operations. With over 75% of our farmland being leased from non-ag owners, land security is a challenge. *We must continue to see EQIP funding for all farmers, not just watershed based, in order to hold onto our farmland. Any legislation involving land use must address this factor of non-ag owners who would rather not rent their land if it means assuming liabilities with farm bill programs.*

### **5. The enhancement of rural economic growth.**

Rural economic growth is very important to many of our small towns. Farms in Connecticut are just as valuable, or more valuable for the land they hold in working open space as they are for the economic value of the product they produce. The cost of services to our towns on developed, residential land is \$1.30 for every dollar put in for taxes, while the open agricultural land only costs the towns \$0.40 in services for every dollar collected. Our farms are multifunctional in nature. We will never produce the grain found in the Midwest, but our farms play a far greater role in our communities. *We need to create opportunities and programs which encourage farms and communities to come together even more for things such as farmers markets and agri-tourism opportunities.*

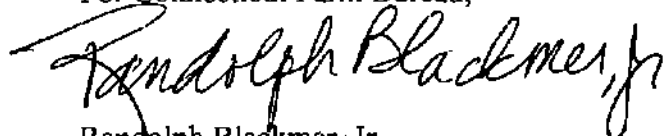
### **6. Opportunities to expand agricultural products, markets, and research.**

The University of Connecticut and the Ag Experiment Station are absolutely vital to the success of CT agriculture, as well as for our citizens well being. Funding is critical for these institutions, and we must see an increase in the CSREES budget. Educational challenges can be overwhelming but we need programs such as the ones offered by Cooperative Extension to provide unbiased information and transfer of knowledge to our farmers. Unfortunately their

budget continues to get slashed, and with no county government in this state, it is increasingly more challenging. We have phenomenal resources at our land grant institution, but need to be sure the educators can reach our agricultural and community audiences. UConn is leading the way in our state with GIS and land use planning maps, but there is never enough time or funding to reach the critical mass. Technology is used when ever possible, but we do have needs for face to face meetings. Competitive grants do not work... we have state issues that UConn can best address not Penn State or Cornell. *Get us funding for Cooperative Extension.*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment.

For Connecticut Farm Bureau,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Randolph Blackmer, Jr." in a cursive script.

Randolph Blackmer, Jr  
President

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE  
SECRETARY, USDA

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